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Statement submitted by Asia Pacific Women's Watch (APWW), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Asia Pacific Women's Watch is a regional network representing voices from across the five sub-regions of Asia and the Pacific. We welcome the priority theme for the sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

A number of International Instruments commit to it, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action, yet it remains a fact that in most countries these have not been realised universally. Most marginalised and vulnerable sections of women continue to be deprived of these.

Social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure are at the heart of achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Without scaling up investments in this area, virtually all of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals — be they social, economic, environmental or political — will remain out of reach. Social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure play a critical role in "transforming our world". As such, their provision must be geared to changing unequal gender relations to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Social Protection and security must be viewed through the women's rights perspective. Gender responsive social protection should not be perceived only about women in labour markets, it has to be about women at home, in farms and forests and fields where women are. There is need for social security discourse to be redefines to look at the strategic and practical needs of women especially from the socially and economically vulnerable groups.

Gender justice for all women and girls is a core human right, and indispensable for gender equality, development, poverty reduction and is crucial to achieving human progress. While social protection measures do not explicitly aim to achieve gender equality, women have always been targeted as beneficiaries of social protection programmes, either individually or as female heads of households. Current social protection systems are displaying a growing disparity within populations of women. We are witnessing a growing invisibility of gender equality across all levels of society where women are forced into adversarial judicial systems where power and control are clearly discerned. The ongoing negative effects of colonisation on indigenous women and girls and the intersectionality of discriminations against women compound rather than diminish outcomes. The continuous exposure of indigenous women and ethnic minority women and women with disabilities to intersecting forms of discrimination is evident across access to all public services. Intersecting forms of discrimination fuelled by race, gender, class, caste, ability stereotypes remain a key issue within the Asia and Pacific Region.

With the sustainable development goals being economically focused States are looking to labour laws and codes that affect organized workers. The unorganized sector, e.g. home-based workers fall through the gaps. Gendered power relations in health systems are severely impacting universal health cover and services, despite this being a key target area under the Sustainable development goals.

In situations of natural disaster or conflict sound social protection systems for women have diminished, are precarious or completely lacking in times of forced migration, wars and famine with disastrous consequences. As the world continues to experience incremental yet unpredictable climate change, the inter-linkages with sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) is an emerging issue that needs to be addressed in the context of sustainable development. The interlinkages between sexual and reproductive health and climate change are complex and indirect, and yet

there is a resurgence of population discourse that attempts to make simplistic connections between climate change and population growth.

Climate change, has drastic implications on delta and low-lying coastal communities and many island nations. The ability of women to live on their land is rapidly diminishing. Survival, let alone empowerment and sustainable development are threatened.

Violence against women and girls remains a key priority for the Region. Women remain highly vulnerable to various and intersecting forms of violence and exploitation and remain highly exposed due to ethnicity, age, race, class, caste, marital status, sexual orientation and (dis)ability.

Among the first attacks on women's bodies and their lives by populist states include the erosion of women's reproductive rights and facilitation of cuts in social services. We are witnessing increased legislation that reduces accountability for the perpetration of domestic violence and the rape of women and girls. We also note that some states are developing policies and changing their development aid programmes to prohibit women's access to education and services that promote their health and wellbeing. These developments are backward steps with respect to compliance with Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the sustainable development goals.

Societies across the region are being subjected to religious extremism and "fundamentalisms", women face increasing incidences of violence when diversity is not tolerated. 'Honour killing' and 'Sorcery killing' in most instances goes unreported, murders are perpetrated within the context of shame, property disputes and inheritance rights of women. Female genital mutilation in the name of religion and culture remains a key challenge. Some governments resort to manipulating the right to cultural and religious diversity as a pretext for violating human rights, including the rights guaranteed to women and girls, HIV survivors, and persons with diverse sexual orientations. Homosexuality is criminalized or treated as a punishable offence in a number of countries.

Asia Pacific Women's Watch urge States to make concrete actions to:

- Recognise, implement and report on gender sensitive social protection measures must take into account not only women's needs, time and energy constraints, but also aim to make social and economic structures more equitable in order to give women more power.
- To review, analyse and re-strategize all efforts on how to respond to ending all forms of violence against women in all situations.
- Protect women's rights and interests. Ensure sufficient basic medical services for women and pay particular attention to the health needs of rural women, women in poverty, women with disabilities, migrant women, middle-aged and senior women and women of ethnic minorities.
- Strive for women's development in tandem with social and economic progress. Governments should take into account of national realities and the special needs of women when they make development strategies, so that women enjoy equal share of the fruits of development.
- To strengthen political will and invest and allocate funds for women's and girl's access to health and education and participation in political and public life.
- To maintain accountability and transparency in state reconstruction by including women's needs and priorities, women's human rights including their sexual and

reproductive health and rights, access to justice, and representation and participation in peace processes.

- To ensure the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions on women peace and security and to recognise the needs and priorities of women in conflict and post conflict must be comprehensively addressed.
- Urges governments and aid agencies in disaster and emergency situations, to ensure provision of gender responsive relief strategies and strong preventative measures to bring services to women and girls, including sexual and reproductive health and work to eliminate violence against women. Longer term measures are essential to mobilize women and girls and enable confidence and ability to make choices for their health and sexual and reproductive rights and violence prevention.
- To provide confidential and secure domestic and sexual violence interventions that meet the needs of a diversity of women, who are currently underserved by existing services. This includes the provision of specialist services where these are required. Safe houses/women's refuges, especially for women who require higher support such as disabled women that include levels of clinical care, than provided in the usual refuge situation.
- To strengthen health policies and decrees related to VAW/gender-based violence are fundamental in initiating and sustaining health sector responses, are holistic and integrated and include; community level awareness raising programmes done in a rights-based, gender-sensitive and culturally sensitive manner, integration of gender-based violence into the medical curricula, provide sexual and reproductive health and rights education in schools as a means of primary prevention.
- For stronger political will to institutionalise a systemic gender-based violence prevention response into routine sexual and reproductive health care, models need to use rights-based and gender sensitive approach and include monitoring and formal evaluations. This needs to be achieved in a sustainable way in order to reach the diversity of women, while effective project-based interventions need to be sustained.